

FISH and WILDLIFE COMMISSION AGENDA ITEM COVER SHEET

Meeting Date: August 11, 2016

Agenda Item: Blackfoot-Clearwater WMA Forest Restoration Project

Division: Wildlife

Action Needed: Final

Time Needed on Agenda for this Presentation: 10 Min

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Background

This forest management project will implement a combination of treatments on approximately 370 acres of the Blackfoot-Clearwater Wildlife Management Area. The proposed treatments include salvage logging of mountain pine beetle killed trees, commercial thinning, fuels reduction (thinning, piling, and burning), and removal of encroaching conifers in quaking aspen stands. The proposed treatment area is important for big-game winter and summer range, elk calving grounds, and grizzly bear habitat. This project will be designed to improve big-game forage production and promote historical stand conditions (e.g., large diameter trees, open understory) typical of forests within high frequency fire regimes. Desired future conditions will enhance habitat for small mammals (e.g., rodents), retain and recruit large diameter snags for cavity nesting species, and enhance a mosaic understory that favors recruitment of shrubs and grasses. FWP would begin implementation of this project in the summer of 2016 through the fall of 2018. This project would also support the statutory requirements of MCA 87-1-622 to “address fire mitigation, pine beetle infestation, and wildlife enhancement...”

Public Involvement Process & Results

The draft environmental assessment was made available for public review on May 21, 2016. FWP received no public comment on the proposed Blackfoot Forest Restoration Project. FWP has considered and incorporated internal comments into the Decision Notice and recommendation to the Commission. Changes from the original proposal included retaining patches of Douglas-Fir regeneration to provide additional hiding cover and increased snag retention in pine beetle killed stands.

Alternatives and Analysis

No action will allow for a continued departure from historic conditions that would further degrade wildlife habitat conditions associated with this project. No action would allow the stands proposed for treatment to continue to grow trees on sites that do not favor dense forest conditions resulting in increased susceptibility to forest insect and diseases and risk of stand replacement fire not typical of forests in these areas.

Agency Recommendation & Rationale

FWP recommends implementing the proposed Forest Restoration Treatments based on the demonstrated need to improve future forest stand and wildlife habitat conditions. Due to fire suppression, beetle infestation, and past logging activity the current forest conditions do not reflect historical conditions that favor productive wildlife habitat for a variety of endemic species.

Proposed Motion

I move the Commission approve the proposed forest restoration project on Blackfoot-Clearwater WMA as presented by FWP.